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THE NEVADA STATE MUSEUM

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[Title Page]

CARSON CITY, NEVADA OCTOBER 1959

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NEVADA STATE MUSEUM

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PAPERS

NUMBER ONE

NOTES ON PAVIOTSO MATERIAL CULTURE, NUMBER 1

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OCTOBER 1959
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PREFACE

In the arid desert of the Great Basin, rivers and streams empty into the interior valleys and create lakes and marshy areas. These marshes were very important to the Indians who lived near them and fished in their waters and hunted the migrating waterfowl which are attracted to them. From the reeds and rushes growing in the marshes and around the shores of the lakes, they fashioned light rafts or balsas. They used these balsas as a means of transportation across the water and as an aid in pursuing their quarry.

Wherever extensive pools of water are found in the Great Basin the Indians made tule balsas. The exact form of these rafts differed slightly from group to group. To make the balsa, from one to five bundles of tules were lashed, or occasionally pinned, together. The pointed prow of the raft usually curved upward, while the stern was trimmed off and not pointed. Sometimes extra, small bunches of reeds were tied along the sides of the raft to form a gunwale. The balsas were usually poled, pushed ahead of the wading hunter, or pulled by a rope by a swimmer. Only a few Basin Indians paddled them.

In these same marshy areas where cattails are plentiful the Paviotsos of northern Nevada used them to make conical thatched winter houses. Domed and conical houses made of willow and grass or rush thatching were common in the Great Basin but this particular sort of cattail house was made only by the Paviotsos.

In this report Mrs. Wheat describes with words and photographs how a tule balsa and a cattail house were made by present day Paviotsos near Stillwater, Nevada.

—The Editor.

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[P. 5]
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MAKING A TULE AND CATTAIL BOAT

124 396 In order to secure a tule boat for the Nevada State Museum, the author arranged to have one made by Jimmie and Wezzie George, Paviotsos of the Toedokado Band of Stillwater, Nevada. The boat was built in a marshy area north of Stillwater known locally as Dutch Bill.

Jimmie George and Sam Dick, Wezzie's father, made boats when they were young. Hammy Kent, on whose property the boat was made, said that as a boy (around 1920) he had seen many such boats pulled out on the banks of the Still- [182] water marshes to dry. Since that time boat making has been abandoned and they are never seen today.

396 Jimmie had gone to Dutch Bill the day before to gather the tules. The car could not be driven close to the tule piles so he and Wezzie carried them on their backs [182] in the old fashioned way to the area where they planned to cut and soak the cattails.

Jimmie cut the cattails and tied them into large bunches. When he had collected enough of them, he pushed them under water with a bucket. Soaking the cattails toughens them. He explained that dry cattails and tules are much stronger than the green plants. For this reason boats were always made during the winter.

396 283 The boats were made of two large bundles of tules lashed together with ropes of twisted cattails. Cattails were used to make the ropes because, though tules are round and pithy and therefore very bouyant, they have no strength. Two bunches of cattails were used to make one rope. The tips of the two bunches were placed in opposite directions and the bunches twisted together. The length of the rope was determined by the length of the overlap measuring from the butt ends. When a quantity of ropes had been made, a large bundle of tules was piled up and the ropes twisted around the bundle to tie it together. To secure the tips the ropes were not knotted but the ends were twisted together and tucked into the tules. After the first bundle was tied Jimmie and Wezzie sorted out the cattails which would [521] make good ropes to tie the second bundle and began to twist them into another [223] set of ropes. While they were working, a pair of noisy ducks brought on a burst [825] of conversation. Wezzie said that when the wind blows the ducks fly a lot and that was the time when her father hunted them. He would hide among the reeds in the marsh and shoot them as they flew overhead. When it is warm and not windy, the ducks are lazy, just as people are. Then they sit in one place all day and do not fly. When the ropes had been prepared, Wezzie helped Jimmie tie the second bundle of tules. Each bundle was tied in five different places.

396 Next the tips of the two tule bundles were tied together. Wezzie and Jimmie drew up the prow of the boat and while Wezzie held it, Jimmie tied it. With a knife Jimmie trimmed off the uneven lengths of tules from the prow. Then Wezzie waited by the boat while Jimmie gathered more cattails. Jimmie used a manila rope to tie the stern of the boat. Manila rope slips more easily than cattails, thereby permitting a tighter tie. When the stern was tied snugly he then replaced the manila rope with a cattail one. After it was tied he trimmed the stern of the boat to make it round. When questioned, Jimmie said he had never seen a boat pointed on both ends.

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When the two tule bundles were tied together and trimmed, Jimmie laid a bunch 396
of cattails across the bow and with a twisted cattail rope tied it to the front of the boat. With more cattail rope he tied similar bunches of cattails along the sides of the boat, this time fastening them with knots instead of by twisting as he had done before. Another small bunch of cattails was laid across the stern of the boat and tied down. Finally the tips of the cattail bunches were tied to the boat along the sides. These bunches were tied along the sides of the boat to make a rim which was used to keep the harvest of duck eggs, ducks, mudhens, etc., from rolling off the boat. Wezzie said that cattails were used for the rim instead of tules because they are much stronger. Then Jimmie stepped into the center of the boat to make a deeper hollow.

The completed boat was eight and one-half feet long and so light that it could 501
easily be lifted by one hand. Jimmie demonstrated how the boat was used in the water. It held his weight without trouble. He said that the boats were always poled and never paddled. Most of the time it was used as a raft to carry the game and the gun and was pushed ahead while the hunter waded. It was not pulled, he said. When the boat was taken from the water it was quite heavy from absorption and would have to be dried out before it could be used again. A boat would last for only one year. Only one person could ride on these rafts and they were used more to carry the waterfowl the hunter had bagged or the eggs which had been collected than for transporting people. Formerly each hunter made his own boat.

MAKING A CATTAIL HOUSE

The Nevada Artists Association requested the All American Unit of the 114
A. W. V. S. to display an exhibit of Paiute Indian arts and crafts at the California 342
Building in Reno, Nevada, on April 19 and 20, 1958. The exhibit included a cattail house. In the old days such houses were built near the source of the material and were, therefore, common in the valleys near marshy areas. On April 17, 1958, Jimmie and Wezzie George of Stillwater, Daisy Aster, Lily Shaw and Dora John of Wadsworth, Nevada, all Paviotsos, made the house at Wadsworth after which it was transported to Reno. Jimmie and Wezzie George and Daisy Aster had made cattail houses before. Lily Shaw had lived in one but had never seen one made, while Dora John had never seen one before, but had heard of them.

The material for the house, which had been gathered prior to building, con- 342
sisted of eleven willow poles which were over ten feet long, many smaller willow sticks about five feet long, and a large quantity of dried cattails. Pieces of worn blue denim were available to be torn into strips for ties. In the old days dried cattails were used instead of the cloth for tying the elements of the house together.

Lily and Daisy dug small holes in the ground in a circle, loosening the dirt with sticks and knives. In these holes the willow poles for the house framework were set and the dirt packed around them. Lily then trimmed the poles. Daisy and Jimmie tore the pieces of denim into strips for tying the willow frame. Jimmie started tying willow sticks horizontally around the standing poles. This horizontal brace was about two and one-fourth feet above the ground. He used the torn denim strips for ties. While he tied on the reinforcing willows, Daisy steadied the uprights and Lily tore more rags and hung them across the brace where they were handy. Wezzie trimmed the sticks. On the east side they left an opening for a door. Lily said the door was toward the rising sun. When all the cross pieces were secure, a

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342 second circle of willows was put into place. Although this circle was only about face high it crossed the door opening. The second horizontal brace drew the house in slightly. When the third row of reinforcing willows was added, the top of the house frame was pulled in abruptly. The frame was very sturdy now. No attempt was made to close the top, as this was left for a chimney or smoke hole.

When the frame was completed, three willow sticks about five feet long were laid on the ground. Cattails were spread evenly over these and three more willows laid on top. Using strips of cloth, the bottom willows were tied to the top willows, care being taken to include some of the cattails in the loop. This was done to leave the holes in the mat as small as possible where the ties were made. When the mat was finished, it was laid against the frame of the house and tied into place. More and more mats were made in the same manner. When each was finished, it was tied onto the frame. The first row of mats was placed around the house at the bottom. The second row overlapped it on the outside for good drainage. An extra mat was made to cover the doorway. Nine mats in all were used.

A house of this size, Wezzie said, would be used for a sweat house or a play house or perhaps for one person. The larger houses, which were built for families to live in, would last five years or more. In the fall new mats would be made to add an extra layer and cover the holes caused by weather and wear. A fire for [764 cooking and warmth would be built in the center. In the old days when someone 765] died in these houses they were burned.

Carrying the tule bundles

[End Plate 1A]

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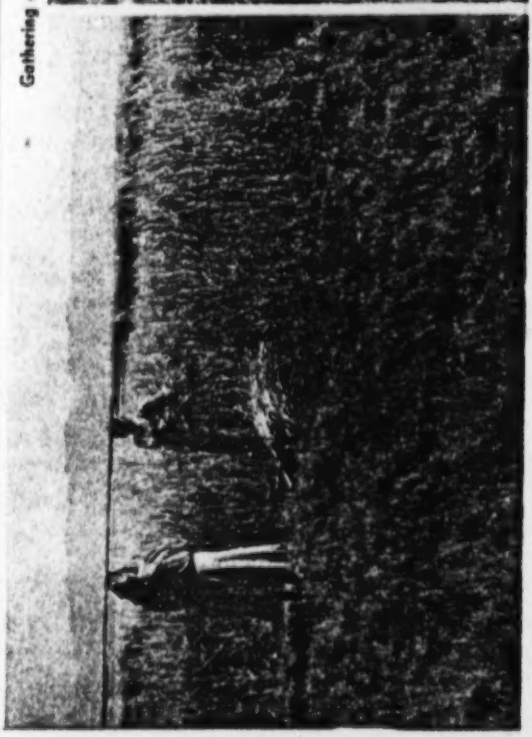
Gathering cattails



[End Plate 1B]

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[End Plate 2A]

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[End Plate 2B]

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Twisting more rope

Tying the second tule bundle

[End Plate 3A]

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Tying the tule bundles together

Trimming the prow

[End Plate 3B]

Tying the stem with a cattail rope
Trimming the stem to make it round

[End Plate 4A]

Tying bunches of cattails along the sides of the boat to make a rim

[End Plate 4B]

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Stepping in the boat to deepen the hollow

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[End Plate 5A]

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The completed boat

[ENA PLATE 58]

Poling the boat

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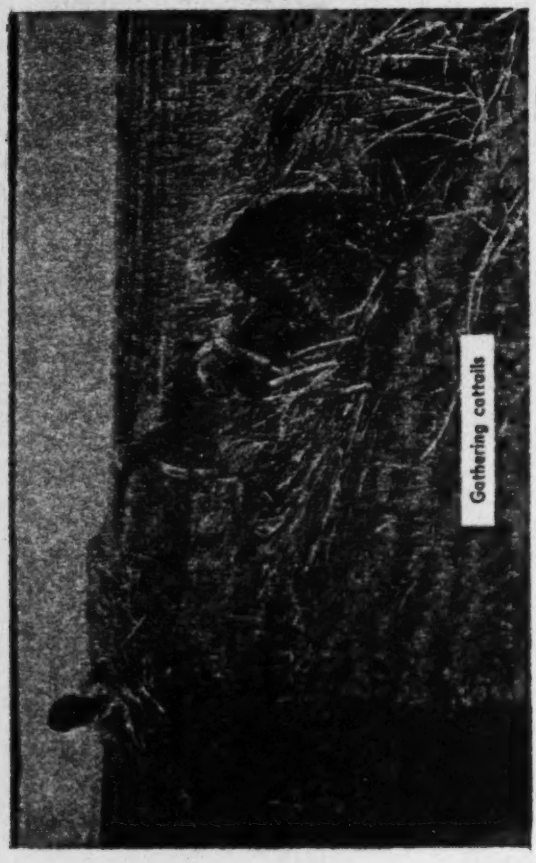

Gathering cattails

[End Plate 6A]

Putting the willow poles in place

Tearing the strips of denim

[End Plate 6B]

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Tying on the first row of reinforcing willow sticks

[End plate 7A]

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Tying on the second row of reinforcing willow sticks

[End Plate 7B]

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Trying on the third row of reinforcing willow sticks

[End Plate 8A]

Three willow sticks form the base of the mat

Spreading the cattails for the mat

[End Plate 8B]

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Tying the top and bottom sticks of the mat together

Tying the first mat on the house

[End Plate 9A]

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Making more mats

The first row of mats in place

[End Plate 9B]